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E.O. 12065: GDS 1/18/86 (ARCHARD, D. B.) OR-M
TAGS: PINS, PEPR, MOBS, AP, UR
SUBJ: WHERE ARE THE RUSSIANS?

1. (C) ENTIRE TEXT.

2. NO RELIABLE OBSERVER TO WHOM I HAVE SPOKEN HAS RE-
CENTLY SEEN ANY RUSSIAN TROOPS IN THE SEVERAL AFGHAN
PROVINCES BORDERING PAKISTAN'S NWFP. THE THOUSAND OR
MORE RUSSIANS WHO TOOK OVER JALALABAD IN EARLY JANUARY
HAVE APPARENTLY GONE TO GROUND THERE. NONE SEEMS TO BE
INVOLVED IN GROUND COMBAT OPERATIONS AGAINST INSURGENTS,
ALTHOUGH SOME MAY BE PROVIDING SUPPORT. AFGHAN SOLDIERS,
HOWEVER, ARE ARMED AND OPERATING IN SOME AREAS, AL-
THOUGH NOT VERY AGGRESSIVELY.

3. IN THE PAST FEW DAYS, I HAVE TALKED WITH SEVERAL
PERSONS, MAINLY FOREIGN JOURNALISTS, WHO HAVE JUST COME
OUT OF AFGHANISTAN. MOST TRAVELLED OVERLAND TO AND FROM
KABUL, ONE OVERNIGHTED IN JALALABAD, ANOTHER SPENT A
FEW DAYS IN KONAR PROVINCE, A THIRD TOUCHED ON PAKTIA.
I HAVE ALSO TALKED WITH MANY REPRESENTATIVES OF INSUR-
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GENT GROUPS, AS WELL AS RELIABLE LOCAL SOURCES. NO ONE

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DEPARTMENT OF STATE A/CDC/CMR

REVIEWED BY *[Signature]* Date 5/21/90

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HAS REPORTED SEEING ANY RUSSIANS ON THE KABUL-TORKHAM ROAD EAST OF PUL-I-CHORUM. NEITHER HAVE ANY BEEN SEEN IN JALALABAD OR OPERATING IN THE PROVINCES.

4. THE BRITISH JOURNALIST WHO SPENT THE NIGHT IN JALALABAD ABOUT JAN. 13 REPORTED ON APPARENT ANTI-RUSSIAN HOSTILITY AMONG THE PEOPLE. INITIALLY, EVERYONE WAS SURLY TO HIM, BUT BECAME FRIENDLY UPON LEARNING HIS NATIONALITY. HE WAS AT LIBERTY TO WANDER AROUND. SHOPS WERE OPEN BUT CLOSED EARLY, BEFORE THE 8:00 PM CURFEW. ROADS LEADING OUT OF TOWN CLOSE AT 3:00 OR 4:00 PM. ONE LOCAL REPORTED THAT THE RUSSIAN TROOPS WERE HOLED UP AT THE RUSSIAN-SPONSORED AGRICULTURE SCHEME 35 (SIC) KILOMETERS EAST OF JALALABAD.

5. BRITON DID SEE SEVERAL UNIFORMED AND ARMED AFGHAN SOLDIERS AROUND JALALABAD. SOME WERE IN TRUCKS BOUND OUT OF TOWN, OTHERS ON SENTRY DUTY AT GARRISON AIR FIELD. ABOUT JAN. 14 TWO AUSTRALIANS TRAVELLED OFF MAIN ROAD, AND APPROX. 35 KILOMETERS INTO LAGHAN PROVINCE, FOLLOWING REPORT OF FIGHTING THERE. PAIR REPORT SEEING AFGHAN SOLDIERS PATROLLING MAIN STREET OF HALF-DESERTED VILLAGE WHICH HAD APPARENTLY BEEN ATTACKED BY INSURGENTS NIGHT BEFORE. ROAD NORTH OF VILLAGE WAS CLOSED BECAUSE OF MUJAHADIN PRESENCE. NO RUSSIANS IN EVIDENCE.

6. SITUATION IN KONAR PROVINCE IS STATIC, ACCORDING TO GAMMA PHOTOGRAPHER CHIP HIRTS WHO SPENT JAN. 12-14 THERE. HIRTS ACCOMPANIED JAMAAT-I-ISLAMI REPRESENTATIVES TO OUTSKIRTS OF ASADABAD ON 12TH. GARRISON IS STILL UNDER LIGHT INSURGENT SEIGE AND, APPARENTLY, NO VEHICLES ARE REACHING IT, ALTHOUGH TWO TANKS WERE VISIBLE THERE.

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(COMMENT - THIS CONTRADICTS REPORT OF LOCAL OFFICIAL WHO LAST WEEK SAID RUSSIAN CONVOY HAD REACHED ASADABAD) ASHAR GARRISON, WHERE HIRTS SPENT NIGHT OF 12TH, REMAINS IN REBEL HANDS. THERE IS NO VEHICULAR TRAFFIC IN AREA. TWO MI-8 HELICOPTERS CAPTURED IN AUGUST HAVE BEEN BURNED. PRESUMING THEY HAVE SOME VALUE TO KABUL, AIRCRAFT'S PRESENCE SUGGESTS TO ME THAT NO SIGNIFICANT GOVERNMENT FORCE HAS BEEN IN AREA SINCE AUGUST.

7. NEAR ASHAR, HIRTS MET MAJOR ABUL RAUF, FORMER

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GARRISON COMMANDER AT ASMAR, WHO DEPARTED TO INSURGENTS IN AUGUST ONLY TO MEET WITH CONSIDERABLE MISADVENTURES CAUSED BY ANTAGONISMS BETWEEN INSURGENT GROUPS. ABUL RAUF'S MORALE HAS APPARENTLY IMPROVED AS HE CLAIMS TO BE PLANNING A BIG OFFENSIVE IN THE AREA. RAUF CLAIMS HE LEADS 28,000 MEN (I PRESUME THIS NUMBER INCLUDES ALL ADULT MALES AMONG SAPI TRIBESMEN).

8. ACCORDING TO HIRES, SOME INSURGENTS REPORTED A RUSSIAN PRESENCE IN KONAR, BUT AS MAJORITY SAID OPPOSITE, HIRES THOUGHT IT UNLIKELY. HE DID OBSERVE 15 HELICOPTERS PASS OVER ON 13TH, APPARENTLY ENROUTE TO BARIKOT GARRISON, WHICH, HE SPECULATED, COULD HAVE BEEN CARRYING TROOPS. THIS SUPPORTS REPORT I RECEIVED IN EARLY JAN. THAT RUSSIANS HAD BEEN AIR LIFTED INTO BARIKOT. A WELL INFORMED SOURCE FROM NEARBY CHITRAL, HOWEVER, TOLD ME ON 18TH HE THOUGHT STORY IMPLAUSIBLE.

9. PAKTIA PROVINCE IS THE FAVORITE TURF OF MANY OF MY INSURGENT SOURCES. NONE HAS HEARD OF ANY SIGNIFICANT RUSSIAN COMBAT FORCE THERE (ADVISORS, OF COURSE, HAVE BEEN IN PAKTIA FOR SOME TIME). NOR DID AN AMERICAN PHOTOGRAPHER WHO JUST RETURNED FROM PAKISTAN'S NORTH WAZIRISTAN (ON BORDER OF PAKTIA) KNOW OF RUSSIAN PRESENCE.

10. COMMENT: IT SEEMS MOST UNLIKELY THAT THE SOVS
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WOULD HAVE WITHDRAWN FROM EASTERN AFGHANISTAN. THUS, ONE WOULD CONCLUDE THAT THEY ARE IN JALALABAD GARRISON AND/OR AT THE AGRICULTURE PROJECT, OUT OF SIGHT OF FOREIGN NEWSMEN AND AN UNFRIENDLY AFGHAN PUBLIC.
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